

The Jodo Mission Bon Dance and Hawaii's Nikkei Community

Department of Education, Bukkyo University Sunao Goto

Abstract

The author stayed at the College of Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa, as a visiting scholar from April to September 2017, and had the privilege to present his research at the end of his stay. This paper briefly introduces the presentation that he gave at the university on September 21st, 2017. The research question of this study aims to discover roles that the Jodo Mission O-bon services, which is a major local activity, play in the Nikkei community in Hawaii. Phase 1 of this research, which the author conducted at Jodo Mission temples on three different islands in Hawaii, indicates that the maintenance of temples itself has become challenging due to the drastic decline in parishioner numbers, except for one temple; Lahaina Jodo Mission in Maui. He focused on Lahaina Jodo Mission in Phase 2, and learned that Japanese newcomers (recent immigrants) have played an active role in the Nikkei community.

Key Words : Nikkei, Hawaii, Community, Bon Dance

Introduction

The author had the opportunity to observe the O-bon service in Hawaii when he took his first sabbatical leave at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2010. Given the fact that it has become challenging, due to aging and depopulation, to sustain local activities, including Bon dance festivals, in the neighborhood where the author has been conducting his research in Kyoto, he was astonished at the success of the festivals held in Hawaii. He therefore wanted to clarify the roles that O-bon services play in the Nikkei

community in Hawaii, and how such local activities encouraged further community development in the region.

Research Summary

a. Research Objectives

There are about 100 different Buddhist temples across the islands of Hawaii that hold Bon dance festivals every year during the months of June to September. It is the culture that has been celebrated and inherited by descendants of Nikkei immigrants, and some of their family members now include Yonsei (4th generation) and Gosei (5th generation). This

research aims to clarify the roles that O-bon services play in the Nikkei community in Hawaii.

b. Research Schedule

The field research was conducted during the months of May to August at various Jodo Mission temples, and was divided into three phases as shown below. The main activities of the field research included, but were not limited to, on-site visits, field/local community observation, and interviews with people involved in the activities.

Phase	Date	Temple	Island
Phase 1	05/21/ 2017	Lahaina Jodo Mission	Maui
	05/23/ 2017	Kohara Jodo Mission	Big Island
	05/25/ 2017	Koloa Jodo Mission	Kauai
Phase 2	06/25/ 2017- 07/02/ 2017	Lahaina Jodo Mission	Maui
Phase 3	08/16/ 2017- 08/19/ 2017	Jodo Hawaii Betsuin	Oahu

Based upon the research conducted in Phase 1, the author discovered that it has become increasingly challenging to maintain the temples themselves as the number of parishioners continues to decline over the course of the years. This, however, was not the case for Lahaina Jodo Mission in Maui. The author, therefore, decided to focus his research on Lahaina Jodo Mission in Phase 2 with support from local priests.

c. Observation at Lahaina Jodo Mission

The Bon dance festival was held at the temple from June 30th to July 1st as for the year 2017. The festival started off with an O-bon service followed by a performance by a Japanese singer-songwriter and a *toro nagashi* event. After that, a Bon dance was held for two hours during which participants danced to 30 different songs such as *tanko bushi*, *pokemon bushi*, and *horehore ondo*. *Fukushima ondo* was the only song that was played live, by a group of people with *taiko* drums. Participants were dressed in their *happi* or *yukata*, and this seemed to be one of the biggest local events that welcomed people both inside and outside the community.

d. Nikkei Newcomers

The author observed and interviewed people who have been involved in O-bon services from an early stage, and discovered that there are usually three different groups that play active roles in such local events: the temples, the Nikkei parishioners, and people from the local community. Parishioners, usually Nikke Nisei (2nd generation), Sansei (3rd generation), and Yonsei (4th generation), take leadership roles in the event—venue set-up, which usually starts from a week prior to the event, and food preparation, which usually starts on the early morning of the event day. In addition to the three groups mentioned above, the author has discovered through the interviews and observations that Japanese newcomers (recent immigrants) have also played an active role in the O-bon service held at Lahaina Jodo Mission.

More than 6,000 tourists travel from Japan to Hawaii every single day, whether it is for a weeklong or long-term stay. Hawaii has always been one of the most popular destinations for people in Japan, and the purposes of their stays seem to have diversified over the course of recent years. Oahu seems to still be the most popular place for Japanese people living in Hawaii to reside; however, this research has

indicated roles that local events like O-bon services play for those Japanese newcomers residing in other islands, like Maui. The Japanese newcomers living in rural areas, especially the ones in Maui, seemed to have a greater involvement with their local communities with specific objectives/purposes on their minds.

e. Hawaii Nikkei Community Studies on Jodo Mission Bon Dance

**Hawai'i Nikkei Community:
Studies on Jodo Mission Bon Dance**
Talk by Sunao Goto, UH Mānoa College of Education Visiting Scholar
from Bukkyo University, Japan

Date: Thursday, September 21, 2017
Time: 5:00 – 6:30 pm
Venue: 2776 University Avenue, Wist Hall, Room 131, Honolulu, HI 96822
Free and open to the public

There are about 100 different occasions every summer that temples host bon dances, which are part of Japanese Buddhist custom to honor one's ancestors, throughout the islands of Hawaii. Bon dance was usually open to the entire communities though, this is rather a family-oriented activity that is passed down through the generations amongst the Nikkei. This 30-minute presentation will talk about the sustainable system in Nikkei tradition, in case of Bon Dance.

Please join us in the evening event with our international visiting scholar Sunao Goto of Bukkyo University (Japan) on Thursday, September 21st from 5:00pm to 6:30pm in Wist 131 where he will share some of the findings from his research conducted here during his time as a visiting scholar at our College.

About Sunao Goto:
Goto is currently a Professor at the School of Education, Bukkyo University, Kyoto. His research is aimed at studying the inclusive elementary education with its emphasis on curriculum development for heterogeneous learners. Some of the courses he teaches at the university include: Teaching for Equity/Social Justice, Designing Curriculum/Instruction, and Student Teaching. Starting from 2018, he will be conducting research on education and community development in a university neighborhood where "Burakumin" as well as "Zainichi" reside.

Nikkei Community in Hawai'i: Studies on Jodo Mission Bon Dance

Sunao Goto
Visiting Scholar from Bukkyo University, Japan
September 21, 2017@Wist131, UHM

Self-introduction

- Sunao Goto**
- Professor, School of Education, Bukkyo University
 - Research area: Inclusive elementary education and community education
 - Courses I teach: Teaching for equity/social justice, designing curriculum/instruction, student teaching
 - 2003: Began visiting elementary schools in Honolulu through the UHCOE and Bukkyo partnership
 - 2010: Stayed as a visiting scholar at UH for 6 months, conducted field observations at elementary schools with a strong curriculum on ELLs, Hawaiian Studies, and Adult Schools (e.g., Alaiwai Elementary School and Nanaikapono Elementary School)
 - April-Sept, 2017: A visiting scholar at UH for 6 months, conducted field observations at elementary schools (e.g., Alaiwai Elementary and Kaimuki Elementary School)

Research Background

- In 2016:
- Hate Speech Act of 2016 (Japan)
 - Act of the Promotion of the Elimination of Buraku Discrimination

- Starting from 2018:
- Research grant on community development on a university neighborhood district (*rakushi*) where burakumin as well as zainichi reside



Research Background (continued)

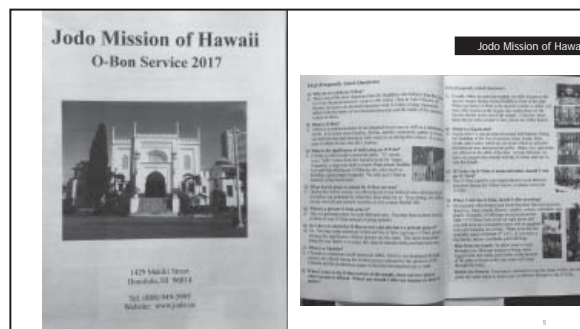
- Previous research has shown that
 - Local activities "plays a significant role in promoting local and regional development, and in improving the living conditions of the people"
 - Participation in community activities "is associated with behavioral well-being among adolescents"
- One of our biggest local activities that we offer to the university neighborhood district is an annual bon-dance. Due to aging and depopulation, the attendance of the activity has been decreasing. However, I was surprised to see the popularity of bon-dance at the Hawaii Jodo Mission in 2010.

<http://pdfproc.lib.msu.edu/?file=/JMAC/Africa/v%20Journals/pdfs/social%20development/vol10no1/jsda010001003.pdf>
<https://www.loc.org/loc/2007/august/a3.php>



Obon & Bon Dance

- It is believed in Japanese Buddhist custom that the ancestors' spirits would return to this world during **Obon** (middle August every year).
- People celebrate this festival to express their gratitude to their ancestors for what they have done, through activities such as **Bon Dance**.



June 2017 Newsletter

Posted on May 18, 2017

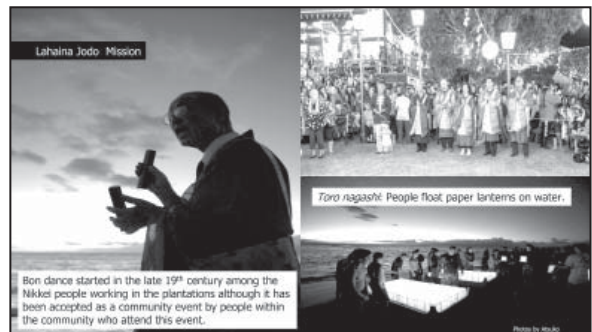
2017 O-BON AND BON DANCE SCHEDULE OF JODO SUKI TEMPLES				
Inland Area	Temple	Phone No.	Dance	Times
Aomori	Shimada	017-722-1111	Shimada Bon Dance	July 13, 18, 23 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Hakuba	027-640-1111	Shimada Bon Dance	July 14, 15, 17 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
			Shimada Bon Dance	July 18, 19, 20 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
No. Honshu	Kamatsuri	Call 018-736-1111	Shimada Bon Dance	July 13, 18, 23 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Hiko	026-229-7528	Shimada Bon Dance	July 14, 15, 17 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Hakobu	026-229-7528	Shimada Bon Dance	July 18, 19, 20 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Hamaoka	026-229-7528	Shimada Bon Dance	August 19 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Hamaoka	Call 018-736-1111	Shimada Bon Dance	August 19 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Sea	Yokohama	Call 045-776-0980	Shimada Bon Dance	July 13, 18, 23 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Kanagawa	Call 045-776-0980	Shimada Bon Dance	July 14, 15, 17 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Kanagawa	Call 045-776-0980	Shimada Bon Dance	July 18, 19, 20 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Chiba	Call 043-228-2828	Shimada Bon Dance	July 23, 28, 29 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Chiba	043-228-2828	Shimada Bon Dance	August 19 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
East	Sagami	Call 042-742-0777	Shimada Bon Dance	July 13, 18, 23 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
			Shimada Bon Dance	July 14, 15, 17 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
			Shimada Bon Dance	July 18, 19, 20 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
			Shimada Bon Dance	August 19 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
	Kofu	055-742-6777	Shimada Bon Dance	August 19 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Research Methods

Bon Dance Observation & Interviews in the following periods:

- May 20-27, 2017
 - Lahaina Jodo Mission (Maui)
 - Kohala Jodo Mission (Big Island)
 - Koloa Jodo Mission (Kauai)
- June 25- July 1, 2017
 - Lahaina Jodo Mission (Maui)
- July 14-15, 2017
 - Haleiwa Jodo Mission
- August 16-19, 2017
 - Jodo Mission of Hawaii
- June through August
 - Attended bon dance events held in various Jodo Missions (Oahu)

The Jodo Mission Bon Dance and Hawaii's Nikkei Community



Findings (continued)

- Kohala Jodo Mission (Big Island), Koloa Jodo Mission (Kauai)
 - Bon dance is considered as the biggest annual event, and each temple with Nikkai parishioners usually host the Obon service and bon-dance; however, aging and depopulation have discouraged such events.
- Lahaina Jodo Mission (Maui)
 - Bon dance is organized by the temple, Nikkai parishioners, local people, and also a group of newcomers from Japan. Monks and artists from Japan are also invited. The director of the Jodo Mission of Hawaii stated that "Bon dance is a comprehensive art that was born in Japan and raised in Hawaii. This local activity is attended by people inside and outside the community."



Discussion/Conclusion

- There are about 6000 Japanese tourists who enter Hawaii every day. Since there is no visa requirement for Japanese people to visit for 90 days or less, they stay at not only hotels but also condominiums. In the case of Waikiki Elementary School, for instance, one third of the fourth graders spoke both Japanese and English. Parents seem to decide their children's schools based upon their reputation. Japanese newcomers who wish to raise their children or retire in Hawaii tend to reside in Waikiki/Honolulu.
- On the other hand, Japanese newcomers who reside in other islands seem to have their own objectives/purposes when it comes to their involvement with the local community activities/events. We can argue that phenomenon is evident in the Japanese community for the Lahaina Jodo Mission Obon Festival.

→ People living in rural areas, especially the ones in Maui, seem to have a greater involvement with their local communities, compared to those living in cities such as Waikiki/Honolulu.

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Future Research

I hope to continue my research on how the local activity, O-bon service, plays a role to the Nikkei community in Hawaii. For future research, I hope to find out how they keep the local activity sustainable, especially in places such as Lahaina, after many years the activity was first introduced to the people.

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References

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- "Japanese Buddhist Temples in Hawaii: An Illustrated Guide", by Tanabe, George J. Tanabe and Willa Jane
- Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i <https://www.jcch.com/>

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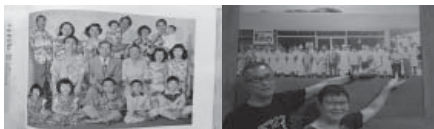
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- Former Faculty Advisor, Hunter McEwan
- Jodo Mission of Hawaii
- Photographer, Atsuko Sekiguchi

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Acknowledgments (continued)

- Ms. Aiko Oda, Ms. JoAnn Soong
 - My research wouldn't have been possible without the help of these two women, who have been supporting me (and Bukkyo University) tremendously over the past 15 years, from English language support to local school visit coordination.



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Acknowledgements/Conclusion

This research would not have been possible without two of my mentors of 15 years in Hawaii, Ms. Soong and Ms. Oda, who are Nikkei Sansei. Ms. Soong and Ms. Oda dedicated their lives as an elementary school teacher and a college professor respectively in Hawaii, and they provided me with the foundation to conduct research on this subject. Ms. Soong also introduced me to the Nikkei Christian community in Hawaii. With this foundation, I hope to conduct comparative study of the Nikkei Buddhist community and the Nikkei Christianity community in the future. Furthermore, I plan to utilize these research results regarding the Nikkei community in Hawaii toward my research on community education and development.

(ごとう すなお 教育学部)

